TRUE GREATNESS,

BY

H. L. BAUGHER, D. D.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

https://archive.org/details/truegreatnessdrs00baug

TRUE GREATNESS.

A DISCOURSE

ADDRESSED TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE,

AUGUST 6th, 1865.

BY H. L. BAUGHER, D. D.,
President of Pennsylvania College.

GETTYSBURG:
PUBLISHED AND FOR SALE, BY AUGHINBAUGH & WIBLE,
CHAMBERSBURG STREET, SECOND SQUARE.
1865.

DISCOURSE.

One of the noblest aspirations of the human soul is the desire of excellency. By this I do not mean the desire to be superior to a rival, or any other man, or all men but the desire of excellency, for its own sake. Thus a man desires knowledge, for its own sake, a good name, virtue, holiness. The desire to be great, to be distinguished amongst men, which is often confounded with the desire of excellency, is a base passion and, when gratified, not unfrequently secures its end by dishonorable means. Men often become great, by the excellency of others, or by circumstances over which they exercised no control. A General is victorious through the blunder of the enemy, or the valor of his troops, and he is at once lauded to the skies. Through the industry and econemy of his ancestors, a man becomes immensely wealthy, and possesses the ability, and uses it, to be generous in his hospitality and liberal in his beneficence. He obtains an enviable reputation. Thus, without any effort of his own, and without the exercise of powers or virtues more than are daily exercised by his poorer neighbors, he becomes great. Illustrations of this point are so numerous and familiar that none need be cited.

We proceed then at once to lay down the position which we desire to establish and illustrate, that true greatness consists in the proper use of common things, and that in this way do we best secure the end of life. When I say common things I mean the ordinary powers of body and mind and the

ordinary gifts of God, Providence, Grace and the acquisitions which may be made through them. And when I speak of a proper use of them, I mean a christian use. I take for granted that the powers and capacities vary, and that each one may be great in his own sphere, when he has used his powers and enlarged his capacities to their utmost limit.

1. Genius is rare and appears after long intervals; which fact proves that it is not necessary to the progress of civilization and the developement of society. Where mythology and history touch, and over-lap each other, in the remote periods of antiquity, more persons stand out in relief, as distinguished from the great mass, than in more recent and historic times. It does, however, by no means follow from this that their natural endowments were much superior to those of their cotemporaries, but rather that they used aright the powers with which they were endowed. Genius in the popular signification of the term, is erratic and lawless, and claims for itself rights and immunities, withheld from others. Yet it is a question with some unsettled and with others long ago decided in the affirmative, whether the great men of the earth have been the scourges of their race and whether their greatness was, for the most part, the greatness of iniquity.

How does a man become truly great? I reply by the right use of *common things*. He is endowed with physical powers and he exercises them on proper objects and becomes physically healthy and vigorous. He developes his mind in the direction of the powers of his mind. He disciplines by patient exercise and close application his powers of perception, memory, judgment, reasoning, imagination. He reads, reflects, converses, writes, speaks, in a word, he disciplines his outer and inner man by bringing them into living contact with the world of things and ideas around him. In this way the business, the trade, the commerce, the science, the literature, the art, in a word, the whole machinery of society, is carried forward. Thus civilization enlarges and diffuses itself. One generation, no more richly endowed than its predecessor, stands on its shoulders, employs its knowledge and skill, en-

larges its horizon and makes progress on its improvements, and thus proceeds, under the guidance of Divine Providence, in the developement of the human race. In this way, ordinary powers become extraordinary, and what, in former generation, was not even conceived, much less accomplished, is now the work of every day. It is in the memory of those living that the sentiment was common, that a turnpike road could not be made across the Alleghany mountains. Now we cross them with the speed of the wind, under the power of steam, and this mighty agent is made to move with the gentleness of the murmuring stream, and is guided by the power of a little child. What has effected all these things? No mighty genius or wonderful mental powers, but the diligent and faithful application of the ordinary powers of body and mind.

2. *Common things are the most useful*, and often are necessary to life itself. What more common than the air, the light, the water, electricity? Without these, constituted as we are, we would cease to live. How much, additional to mere existence, do they contribute to our enjoyment. What a relief to escape from the pressure of carbonic acid gas and breathe the free oxygen of the pure atmosphere? How pleasant is the light, as the eye-lids of the morning open to us, and the gushing spring, as its crystal waters sparkle before the thirsty traveller! Has it ever occurred to you, that these common things are the natural agents, employed by common minds for the purpose of conducting, on its march of improvement, the varied machinery of the world? By these the mighty ocean is traversed, books are printed, cloths of various fabrics are manufactured, and intelligence, with lightning speed, is conveyed from continent to continent. It may be said, without a figure that they feed, and clothe, and transport us whithersoever we will, and furnish us with all the intelligence which we need, or ought to desire. Moreover, through the use which common minds make of these universally diffused agents we derive our daily comforts of home and social life; the thread, and the needle, and the pin, the table and sofa, and the chair, the carpet, and the lounge. and the bed. These all

have been brought within the reach and the control of the masses, and have added so much to the sum of human comfort. It is a cold day in January, and a terrible storm is howling and raging without and a fearful night is closing upon a dreadful day. Now fill up the grate and let it blaze. Roll up the table, light the gas, wheel round the sofa, bring up the chairs, and let us have the calm and peace which God gives us in the midst of the storm. Now open the book-case and bring forth Cowper, a common mind, sanctified by the grace of God. It is the blue and the gold of the River-side press, so neat and convenient. Now let us read and criticise and converse for mutual profit and enjoyment. In this little parlor circle, there is more real, pure, rational enjoyment than in the halls of the great, or in the revelries of the licentious. These are the fruits of common minds on common things.

3. Seldom do we find genius in the pulpit. The general character of the ministers of the gospel, in all ages, has been that of men of ordinary capacity; with this capacity, they were influenced by one of the most common affections, love, to cultivate and enlarge their powers, and employ them for the glory of God and the good of man. Animated by this affection which became an all-absorbing and all-controlling power, they have become the chief agents, in the hands of God, of carrying forward the work of Christian civilization, where it had been commenced, and of extending it to the benighted heathen. Where others were led, by the desire of wealth and power, to expose themselves to the inhospitable regions of the North and the malaria of the tropics, they went forward animated by the love of Christ. Their language was that of the great apostle of the Gentiles, "The love of Christ constraineth us." They have been, and they continue to be, the teachers of the young, and have in their hands the moulding of the mental and moral character of future generations. Who can estimate the amount of intellect which they have waked up into activity and directed aright, and which is now energizing for the glory of a common Master? Who can estimate the prejudices and prepossessions

removed by them, the fierce passions subdued, and the pride and power of man humbled before God; and the multitudes who, through their instrumentality, were brought submissive to the Redeemer's feet? To the department of general and particular knowledge, they have contributed more than any other class of men. They have, indeed, almost exclusively, built up what may be called religious literature. In their contributions to the topography, and geography of ancient places and countries, to the antiquities, manners and customs of remote and savage nations, and to the botany, mineralogy, geology and meteorology of these countries they are unsurpassed. Besides, no class of men has contributed more to the development of the structure and genius of language, and to ethnography and the elucidation of difficult passages of the word of God. To the ministers of the gospel science is largely indebted for her recent progress, and she has had the magnanimity, in some instances, to acknowledge it. I have cited the pulpit as an illustration of what common minds can accomplish in the attainment of the end of life and the promotion of the glory of God, and not for the purpose of according to them a distinction which they do not deserve. In the medical and in the legal professions, the same degree of industry and application have produced most important results.

In medical science, doubt and difficulty have yielded to certainty. So thorough and radical have been the investigations into anatomy and physiology, and so widely has the field of *Materia Medica* been extended, that the physician can use the language of assurance in multitudes of cases which once were enveloped in obscurity. Human suffering has been alleviated, and human life has been prolonged. In like manner, the principles of law, based upon justice, have been more clearly ascertained and defined, in reference both to individuals and nations, and the application of these principles to the specific cases, has been made more simple. So that, with the more general diffusion of the knowledge of rights and duties, there is less litigation, a larger degree of peace and

harmony amongst men, and a consequent improvement in all classes of society. With this advancement in these sciences themselves, there has been a corresponding progress in the moral and religious character of both the profession and the practice. Materialism with its baleful consequences, in the medical profession, has yielded to the investigations of Anatomy and Physiology, and acknowledges and professes a perfect God, whilst the law of God is admitted as supreme in its authority over the heart and life of man.

4. If we descend into a more minute analysis of a few particulars, the position which we desire to establish and elucidate will become more apparent. We are speaking animals, and language is a production of our physical mental organism. Words are the signs which we use for ideas. Of these, the most important are common words. Without them, verbal communication would be difficult, embarrassed and limited. They are not the long euphonious words with which the young and inexperienced are delighted. They are like home scenes and home faces, familiar, tried friends, on whom we have leaned many a weary hour in distress, and who have never failed us when our souls were tried. They are the staple of our conversation and writing. They come with the thought, as faithful servants, unbidden, and carry it whithersoever we will. Shall we dismiss these faithful, home-born servants, and introduce foreigners with the flaring livery and outlandish names in their stead? We could not succeed if we made the effort, for our faithful veterans would come back in spite of us. We might banish the words home and home-joys, and talk about our domicil, our establishment, and our domestic joys; but where there is a heart to feel, where there are sensibilities, susceptible of the most refined and elevated enjoyment, there home and all that is homely will come back with a power irresistible. There are in the English language more than one hundred thousand words. Of these, in ordinary conversation, we do not employ more than a few hundred, and in writing an octavo of a few hundred pages, not more than a few thousand. These constitute the

ordinary instruments by which the mind communicates its thoughts to others. They are the most common factors agreed upon by society for this purpose. The large number of words in a language indicates the mental activity of the people who use it. Yet a new word, to express the same thought or shade of meaning, has no advantage over the old one, except its novelty. We sing but few hymns to comparatively few tunes in the house of God, and these are the expression of common feelings. The range of ideas in the pulpit is limited, and at the bar much more, and yet those in which we are most profited, most built up in the faith, and from which we derive our highest enjoyment are those, which cluster around the cross of Christ and exhibit the perfections of his character. The most eloquent divines, and the most useful, are those who exhibit developments of the plan of Redemption in such a manner as to call into exercise the emotions which are most common to our nature.

5. Any one may excel in the direction in which he desires to excel. In physical development, reasoning, taste, imagination, declamation, style. In love, purity, gentleness, kindness, goodness, truth. The terms which I have used are common terms, and they express powers or capacities which naturally belong to all in a greater or less degree. Any one may excel in several, or in all of them. Do you ask how? I reply by intelligent industry and perseverance. Oliver Cromwell was as common a country gentleman, and with as common conceptions as could be found in the United Kingdom. Yet by industry and perseverance he overthrew that Kingdom, which was thought to be immovable, beheaded the King and reigned in his stead, asserted the rights of Protestants in Catholic countries, and became the terror, as he was the admiration of the crowned heads of Europe. The power which he acquired and wielded, you may acquire and wield, if not in the same direction, in another, more promotive of the glory of God and the good of man. Let us suppose that you desire a good moral character, and I know nothing more desirable in itself, and nothing which will be more promotive

of personal and social happiness, and which will more dignify our common humanity. The good man stands exalted before God and man, as the highest form of excellency. Suppose that, through excessive humility, you should hesitate to attempt the walks of literature or oratory, here is a sphere in which you can move and reach a point of excellency which no genius or art can confer. Suppose you excel in both, here is a character which will add dignity and power to all intellectual and physical excellency. The principle which underlies and supports this character, is love. Love to God is piety. Love to man is morality. When united, they constitute the perfection of character, and secure favor both from God and man. This constitutes the sum of the law and the prophets, and the gospel. No genius is required here, no extraordinary mental powers. It is the development of the most common Christian affection, which the most humble and neglected child of God continually exercises. It is a flame burning on the altar of the heart, and enlarged and made more brilliant every day, by the good deeds which shine in the life more than the most costly jewels. It surpasses in value the gift of tongues, all knowledge of science and art, all the benevolence which is but the outward manifestation of it. It continues longer in action. For whilst tongues, and knowledge, and beneficence will terminate with death, love passes through death and the grave, and, clothed with the robes of that better world, only there can be seen in its true loveliness, and be estimated at its true value. Would you know how to cultivate and develop it? Study the character of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, his Son, until you are filled with the knowledge of him, and the excellency and the glory of his perfections shine into your soul, as the sun in his strength, so that no other light than his shine there. Study his character until you can say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God," and until with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, you may be able to comprehend "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with

all the fulness of God." Then dwell upon the good qualities of your fellow-men, and close your eyes and your lips upon their faults, unless they are of such a character as to justify you in speaking to them personally of them. By considering your neighbor's good qualities, you will find them more numerous and greater than you supposed, which will at once, independently of all other considerations, constitute the foundation for rational affection, whilst inattention to foibles will cause them to disappear from your mental vision, and the occasion of offence will be removed. Here I stand perfectly secure, and can urge you, my young friends, with confidence to the cultivation of an exalted moral character for your own happiness, for the honor of your relatives and friends, and for the glory of God. When the seventy returned to the Saviour, after he had sent them by twos throughout Judea, in the joy of their unusual power and success, they exclaimed, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." His reply is remarkable and should sink deep into our hearts: "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Luke 10 : 18, 19, 20. For the want of a good moral and religious character, no apology can be offered. It is within the power of the lowest capacity, whilst it brings the joyful possessor of it into the most intimate fellowship and resemblance to Christ. Cultivate then the benevolent affections, and subdue and control the malevolent. This will require firmness of purpose, strength of will, perseverance, industry, self-denial, daily exercise, watchfulness and patience. Character is formed by acts. Many strokes of the chisel, strong and delicate, are given before the statue is formed. Many noble acts must be performed, many positions occupied, and relations honorably sustained, to form a good character. These relations are innumerable and each

one calls into exercise a new form of virtue or vice, a new aspect of character, new views, new dangers and new trials, just as every physical movement calls into exercise new nerve force and a new combination of muscular action. When properly called upon, do not hesitate, through fear of difficulty or danger, to enter into new positions and relations, because, in this way, your character will be most rapidly and completely formed. The multiplied and varied scenes through which the Apostle Paul passed, and the conscientiousness with which he discharged the duties thus devolved upon him, constituted the foundation of his exalted character. So often and so variously did he suffer and labor that there was no condition of life for which he was not prepared to sympathize and give advice, so that he stood, before the Church and the world, the embodiment of moral excellency, an honor and glory to our common humanity.

Writers on the subject inform us that the changes in the expression of the face and of the whole body, are the result of the form and combination of the muscles. These express the emotions and sentiments of the soul. Moreover, where the expression is not usually homely, beauty of expression is secured by the sentiments and emotions of the heart. Now, then, the beauty of the statue, and the painting, and the living subject, can be obtained only by a correct representation of the muscles, all of which are to perish, but the beauty of moral excellency, which lies at the foundation of all other, is the work of a lifetime, and it will never perish. You all are painting, each one for himself, on the canvass of eternity, a character of beauty or deformity, and it is made up of the colors of common life.